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In the Trenches Over There

By RAGNA B. ESKIL



No. 639

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By W. D. EMERSON

Author of "A Country Romance," "The Unknown Rival,"
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THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

IN THE TRENCHES "OVER THERE"

A PLAY WITHIN A PLAY
IN ONE ACT

BY
RAGNA B. ESKIL

CHICAGO
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



PS 635
79 E755

CHARACTERS

SERGEANT MILLER
CORPORAL WHEELER.....
PRIVATE O'TOOLE
PRIVATE MALCOLM
PRIVATE JOHNSON
PRIVATE BAKER
GEORGE SHARPE, An Orderly.....
OTHER SOLDIERS

In the Interpolated Play

NURSE GRAY.....Stage Manager
PATSY BURKE.....Who Sings
NURSE BAIRD.....Mrs. Smith
CORPORAL FIELD..... Jake
LIEUTENANT CARSON.....John Baltimore
NURSE ZANE.....Mary Baltimore
NURSE HOLSUM.....Miss Keep
NURSE LINDER.....Miss Cairns

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TIME: A February Afternoon.

Plays forty minutes.

SPECIAL PROPERTIES

A well-fitted bomb-proof trench room or "dug-out"; two tables; a dozen or more camp chairs; a musical instrument; two hooks; a coil of wire; two blankets; comfort bags; suit-case; a bag filled with "smokes" and cigarettes; a towel; a telegram.

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MAY -2 1918

no 1

IN THE TRENCHES "OVER THERE"

SCENE: *A bomb-proof trench room that is one of a solidly-built and well-furnished trench tier captured from the Germans. The walls are boarded up, and several rugs are spread across the floor. The entrance door is at the extreme upper right, and a passage connecting with another trench is at the extreme upper left. An electric light hangs from a rafter in the ceiling. The walls are decorated with two American flags, crossed, a small mirror with a shelf under it on which are a comb and clothes brush, and with colored magazine covers. A clothes rack with khaki coats, overcoats, sweaters and hats is on the rear wall. Two hooks to be used later to stretch the curtain on are in the left wall and the left rear wall. Two cots with blanket covers are set against the rear wall, and four bunks in two tiers are strapped to the wall above them. There is a table at the left and a table in the center of the room. A charcoal brazier stands toward the left front. There are a dozen or more camp chairs around, those not occupied are folded against the right wall. A trench telephone hangs near the right door, and a coil of wire for stretching the curtains is near it.*

At the rise of the curtain, Sergeant Miller, Corporal Wheeler, and Privates O'Toole and Johnson are playing rummy at the center table. Private Baker is writing a letter at the other table; his comfort kit lies at one side. Private Malcolm is sitting on the right hand cot, playing an Hawaiian air on a ukulelee (or other instrument.) After a moment, he changes the air to "Swanee River," and starts to sing:

"All dis world am sad and dreary,
Ebrywhere I roam,
Oh, darkies, how my heart grows weary,
Far from de old folks at home."

BAKER. [*Over his shoulder, gruffly.*] Cut it out!

JOHNSON. [*To BAKER.*] What's the matter, kid? Writing home?

MILLER. [*To MALCOLM.*] Liven her up, old boy, and soft pedal the home stuff!

MALCOLM. [*Throwing down his instrument and rising.*] Oh, thunderation, you're the most talkative, cheerful bunch one could get into!

O'TOOLE. Thanks for the compliment. We didn't know we deserved it.

WHEELER. [*Laying down his cards.*] I win again. Whose deal?

MILLER. [*Getting up and stretching himself.*] Oh, hang it, I don't want to play cards any more. Can't someone think of something more exciting?

O'TOOLE. [*To MILLER.*] Try bumping your head against the wall and see if it will rattle. [*Plaintively.*] But, say, hasn't anyone got a cigarette?

MILLER. That's the fifty-seventh time you've asked that question today?

JOHNSON. Gee, if we could only stay on top where something was doing. Forty feet under ground may be safe, but it doesn't suit me.

O'TOOLE. Me, neither. Oh, only for a snipe at the Huns!

WHEELER. Ah, quit your complaining, and tell me how much longer do you suppose they'll keep us here?

MILLER. [*To WHEELER.*] No, you don't complain, not you! Well, they can't let us out any too soon for me. This bomb-proof seemed pretty soft after being shelled for two weeks, but this doing nothing except look out for mines is getting on my nerves.

MALCOLM. If we could only get something to eat!

MILLER. Eat! Don't we get the best grub in any army?

MALCOLM. Oh, you needn't start preaching. I meant something *sweet* to eat. [*Dreamily.*] Say, boys, did you ever go to a candy pull in the country?

JOHNSON. [*Savagely.*] Quit it!

MALCOLM. [*Ignoring him.*] Or dream that you had all the cigarettes you could smoke?

O'TOOLE. Say, when do you suppose the Red Cross shipment will come to us.

WHEELER. It's been due for two weeks. Gee, if a sub got that!

MALCOLM. [*Gaily.*] You'll go without cigarettes and sweet stuff for another two weeks.

[*All groan and walk about restively.*]

MILLER. [*To MALCOLM.*] Say, play something lively!

MALCOLM. [*Grandiosely.*] If I had an audience that was properly attuned to my artistic sensibilities, I would, but—[*He shrugs his shoulders.*]

O'TOOLE. [*Smiling.*] You mean you'd like a bunch of jack-asses, Malcolm?

MALCOLM. [*Elaborately.*] I don't long for what I already have, thank you.

BAKER. [*Still writing.*] Oh, shut up. How can a fellow think with this noise?

O'TOOLE. [*To BAKER.*] Well, only fools need to *hear* themselves think.

JOHNSON. My, aren't we one sweet-tempered crowd!

BAKER. [*Turning around.*] Say, what date is it?

MILLER. Hanged if I know!

JOHNSON. [*Guessing.*] The seventeenth, isn't it? [*The others shake their heads in doubt.*]

BAKER. Well, that's near enough. But say, what's the month?

WHEELER. [*Promptly.*] It's April.

MALCOLM. Go on—April, your grandfather! Do you know it's below zero, up-stairs! It's February, I tell you.

WHEELER. I always thought February was a short month, and gee, we came down here the first of February and we've been here a year already.

BAKER. Well, I'll put February, then, but, say, is it nineteen-seventeen or nineteen-eighteen.

MILLER. Gee, Baker, how do you suppose we're going

to remember when we lost our calendar? You don't need to put the year down—they can see it on the post-mark.

[*Baker seals his letter and puts it in his pocket.*]

MALCOLM. [*Yawning.*] If only the Huns would try to mine this place, or something would happen! [*A knock is heard.*] My prayer is answered!

MILLER. Come in!

[*Simultaneously with his "come in," the door bursts open, and George Sharpe enters. He is evidently on good terms with Sergeant Miller.*]

MILLER. Why, hello, George! What's this—a message, or just a friendly visit?

GEORGE. [*Going over to charcoal stove.*] Well, it's both. I want to get warm, if I may, and then, I've got a message, too.

MALCOLM. [*Joyfully.*] Do you mean to say we're going to move?

[*The others crowd around eagerly for his answer.*]

GEORGE. No, this isn't anything official, but it's almost as good.

O'TOOLE. [*Excitedly.*] Have those cigarettes and candy come yet?

GEORGE. No, it's something better!

MALCOLM. What can it be—something better than going to the front, or getting cigarettes and sweet stuff! [*He slaps George on the shoulders.*] Out with it, boy!

GEORGE. Well, if you give me time to talk, I'd told you long ago.

BAKER. Cut out the preliminaries and tell us!

GEORGE. Well, then, the nurses' theatrical company is coming to perform before you!

MILLER. Really!

BAKER. Nurses' theatrical company! What's that?

MALCOLM. [*In derision.*] Say, you sleepy bonehead, don't you know that the nurses over at the hospital, now that they aren't so busy, have formed a little theatrical company and are coming around to entertain such fat-

heads as you, so you won't go mad with the exciting life there is in these bomb-proofs.

BAKER. [*His face lighting up.*] You mean real women nurses!

GEORGE. [*Enjoying the sensation he is making.*] Yes, real women nurses, and one of them, Miss Gray, used to be in a real theatrical company—direct it or something like that—

MILLER. You don't say! But when are they coming?

GEORGE. Today—in a few minutes. In fact, they ought to be here any second now.

JOHNSON. Women in this place—real women in this place!

MILLER. [*Taking hold of George by the collar.*] Say, George, you're not fooling now? If you are, I'll throw you forty feet up-stairs and let you taste the sleet on your nice bare neck—

GEORGE. [*Indignantly.*] I'm not fooling, I tell you, and instead of asking me questions, you'd better get busy fixing up this place for them. Those cots over there look nice, and [*To MILLER.*]—a comb wouldn't hurt your hair.

[*All except George immediately scramble to put the room in apple-pie order, and to primp themselves—combing their hair, brushing down their clothes and putting on their coats.*]

O'TOOLE. [*Before the mirror.*] Sure, and it's so long since I've seen a lady, I won't know how to act. Johnson, how do I look?

JOHNSON. Ask the ladies for compliments, Irish, not me.

MALCOLM. [*In high good humor.*] Gee, Irish thinks he's going to make a hit, but I bet the ladies have more taste than that.

O'TOOLE. [*Good-naturedly.*] Sure, and you think they're elevated to your style, you Beau Brummel, do you?

GEORGE. [*Who has been looking on with a superior air at the preparations.*] Say, we took another trench from the Huns this morning.

MILLER. [*Abstractedly.*] Well, that's one more step towards Berlin. [*With concern.*] Say, George, is this part in my hair straight? Malcolm's hogging the "see how nice I look glass," so I can't get near it.

GEORGE. Well, if the part in your hair is more important than taking a trench, I'll say it's—still crooked.

[*Miller continues his efforts to get the part straight.*]

MALCOLM. [*To GEORGE.*] Did you say *we* took the trench, George? No, George, *we* did not take the trench. *We* are buried forty feet under ground. [*He examines his coat critically, and then puts it on a little dubiously.*] Say, Irish, does the wrinkle in the back of this coat show?

O'TOOLE. [*Loftily.*] If you knew how to act before ladies, you wouldn't turn your back to them.

WHEELER. [*Nervously.*] How many ladies are there, George?

GEORGE. [*Promptly.*] Six, and they're all good-lookers, too.

BAKER. [*Starting up.*] Say, we're a nice bunch! Why aren't we up there to conduct them down?

MILLER. [*Disgusted with his neglect.*] Gee, we are a fine bunch, all right. [*He starts for the door.*] I'll go.

THE OTHERS. Here, let me go. I'll go!

[*All except GEORGE rush pell mell for the door.*]

GEORGE. Here, hold your horses! They don't want you! They've got some men in their company, too.

MALCOLM. [*Disgruntled, as they all go back.*] Men! What have they men for? Aren't we men enough?

GEORGE. [*Derisively.*] Don't you suppose they need men in a play, too?

O'TOOLE. [*Sighs.*] Yes, I suppose they do, but it's the ladies we want to see. [*He sighs again.*] It's three months now since I've had sight of the sparkle of a pretty eye, and the bloom of a rosy cheek, and the lilt of a soft, rippling laugh—

MILLER. [*Groans.*] Heavens, if he's as mushy as this before they come, what'll he be like after they get here!

BAKER. [*Contemplatively.*] We could put a gas mask on him—

GEORGE. Oh, yes, and I forgot. They said you were to get hold of as many fellows as can get in this place—

[*A knock is heard at the door.*]

ALL. That must be them!

[*MILLER strides forward to open the door. O'TOOLE and MALCOLM run to get a last glance at themselves in the mirror.*]

NURSES GRAY, PATSY BURKE, BAIRD, HOLSUM, LINDER and ZANE come in, followed by LIEUTENANT CARSON and CORPORAL FIELD. The men in the room salute the lieutenant and bow to the ladies. All the newcomers wear heavy wraps and carry bags and small suitcases.]

MISS GRAY. [*Exclaims.*] My, it seems nice and warm here.

CARSON. [*To GEORGE.*] You told them we were coming?

GEORGE. Yes, sir.

CARSON. Then shall we consider ourselves introduced? We can't stop for much formality, as there may be a train-load of wounded this afternoon, and we must be sure to be back in time. But we thought you men who had been down here so long, might like to see our little play—

MILLER. We certainly appreciate it, sir—and ladies.

MISS GRAY. [*With a smile.*] Then, shall we be getting ready? But, first, perhaps we had better take off our wraps.

MILLER AND OTHER HOSTS. [*In contrition.*] Oh, pardon us. [*They assist the nurses in getting off their wraps. MISS BURKE holds on to her little bag.*]

MISS BURKE. [*Holding out her bag, which she has opened.*] And here is a special present of some chocolate and smokes. Do you care for any?

ALL THE HOSTS. Do we!

O'TOOLE. [*Helping himself.*] And saving your bright eyes, this is the best present we could have had.

MISS BURKE. You're Irish, aren't you?

MALCOLM. [*Laughing.*] Murder will out, Irish.

CARSON. But couldn't we have more men here? I think the room will still hold more.

MISS GRAY. Oh, yes, the more the merrier.

MILLER. I was just going to telephone when you came. I'll get the boys from next to us. [*He goes to the telephone and rings twice.*] Say, you fellows in the "Palace." A play will now be held in the "Grotto." You are cordially invited to be present. Admission to those only whose hair is combed as there are LADY ACTRESSES . . . Yes, I said LADIES . . . Capital L-a-d-i-e-s, and if they act as well as they look, it will be *some* play, believe me. . . . Yes, it's here and right now. Performance is about to begin. Hurry and get a move on yourselves. [*He turns to the nurses.*] There, was that right? [*The nurses smile and nod their heads.*] They wouldn't believe it when I said ladies were here.

GEORGE. Neither would you when I told you. [*In an aggrieved tone to the nurses.*] Why, he even said he'd throw me forty feet up—

CARSON. Say, boys, we'll have to use your furniture for our little act.

MILLER. Oh, certainly, take anything we've got.

MISS GRAY. May we use the blankets off your cots for curtains, and this wire over here will do to stretch it on, and could we have the safety pins from your comfort kits to pin it over with—

CARSON. [*Indicating upper right corner.*] And that corner will do for our stage.

MALCOLM. [*Hunting with his hand for the hooks in the wall.*] And here are two hooks that will be just about right to stretch it between—

MISS GRAY. Why, just the thing. [*Pointing to the upper right door.*] Could we use that door for our stage entrances? Where does it lead to?

MILLER. Certainly you may use it. It goes to our ammunition store room.

MISS BURKE. Then our play ought to be a sure fire success.

O'TOOLE. [*Admiringly.*] Who's Irish now?

CARSON. We'll need both these tables and four chairs and the suitcases.

[*The men push the tables and the chairs and the suitcases in the corner intended for the stage and get down their comfort kits, and everyone helps get the blankets ready for the wire. While they are so engaged, the men from "The Palace" bomb-proof come in, with an announcing knock at the door, and try not to show their surprise at really seeing the ladies.*]

MALCOLM. [*Teasingly.*] Oh, yes, they're real flesh and blood.

O'TOOLE. [*Indicating MISS BURKE.*] If you pinched this one, I'm sure she'd scream.

MISS BURKE. [*Smiling.*] I certainly would.

MILLER. [*With a grand bow.*] Ladies, these are the gentlemen from the "Palace," so named because it has a piece of Brussels rug placed in the midst of its floor. [*He bows again.*] Gentlemen of the Palace, these are Ladies from across the Water, and more than that, they comprise the greatest aggregation of actresses the world—or we—have ever seen.

O'TOOLE. [*Pretending great admiration.*] My, our sergeant can do the grand talk, can't he?

MISS GRAY. [*Laughing.*] He certainly can, but I see our curtain is up now and the actors must retire.

[*The actors, except MISS GRAY, go behind the scenes. GEORGE mixes with the newcomers and tells them how this all happened. The "Grotto" soldiers help straighten things in the room, and also talk to the newcomers.*]

CORPORAL FIELD. [*Sticking his head out from between the curtains, and looking around the room.*] There isn't anything here we can use for a desk, is there? No, I guess not. We'll have to improvise chairs. Just hand me four of them, will you? [*He receives the chairs and disappears.*]

O'TOOLE. [*To MISS GRAY.*] What kind of a play is this going to be?

MISS GRAY. [*Brightly.*] A comedy—and no war talk.

MILLER. [*Appreciatively.*] That's good—not that we would have said anything if you had given us the gloomiest kind of a tragedy, but we like to have a chance to laugh—

MISS GRAY. [*Quickly.*] Don't I know it. And *we* like to forget, too. [*She addresses every one.*] Perhaps you think I am going to be a little "bossy" now, but you see I am the stage manager. As the action of our play requires a little more space than we have curtained off, we will have to go back to the days of Shakespeare, and regard the curtained part as the inner stage, and the rest of the room as the apron or outer stage, and you gentlemen will be the nobles who are allowed to sit upon the stage. But please, please remember we are only amateurs, and don't make such disparaging remarks as they did in the days of Bill Shakespeare, when they didn't like the way things went. Now, will some of you sit here to the right, [*Several of the men take chairs and seat themselves at the extreme right, between the curtain and the foot-lights.*] and will the rest of you take seats on the cots and those chairs along the left wall,—and then that will give us the diagonal center of the room clear. [*With alacrity, the men do as bidden, some sitting on the camp chairs and cots, and some on the floor. Two or more may remain standing. Brightly.*] Now that the stage is ready, I will announce the acts. I will be the barker, or the speaking program, or whatever you will. [*She pauses a moment, and then in a comical imitation of a circus barker.*]

Gentlemen and Soldiers of the Glorious Country across the Sea! We shall present to you this afternoon the wonderful and mirth-provoking comedy, entitled "Between Trains." But since the actors and actresses have not had time yet to get all their powder and paint on, and in lieu of an orchestra overture, we will present an act previous to the first act. This will be a singing number by Miss Patsy Burke. [*The soldiers applaud.*] I noticed a uku-

lele when I came in. Can someone play the "Wild Irish Rose" on that?

MALCOLM. [*Steps forward quickly.*] I can. [*He takes up the ukulele, and pushes his chair forward and seats himself near the open space on the right. One of the soldiers on the left gives his chair to Miss Gray and seats himself on the floor. The curtains part and Patsy Burke steps from between them and sings.* NOTE.—*She may appear either in nurse's uniform or in fancy costume. The soldiers applaud her when she appears and when she has finished.*]

[NOTE.—*Another specialty number may be introduced now if desired, MISS GRAY saying, "Now the second number that precedes our first number is—"*]

MISS GRAY. [*After peeping behind the curtain.*] They're ready now. [*She clears her throat in old school style.*] "Between Trains" is now about to begin. You have no programs, but I believe the play will explain itself. The scene is laid in a small railroad junction dining room—a great deal of which is necessarily left to your imaginations. [*The soldiers smile.*] And in the absence of professional stage hands, will you men nearest the curtains pull them back, please?

[*The men push back the curtains, and the soldiers lean forward expectantly to see the stage so revealed. Two of the camp chairs are placed alongside of each other with the two others on top, to simulate a counter desk. This is placed diagonally across the door, just leaving space for the actors to pass back and forth. The two tables with two chairs at each stand in front of the desk. MISS BAIRD made up as the restaurant manager, MRS. SMITH is standing back of the counter. MRS. SMITH is about fifty years old and rather stout, with her hair in a tight knot. She wears a gingham dress and white apron. CORPORAL FIELD, made up as a country waiter, JAKE, is flipping off the tables with a towel.*]

JAKE. I wish those trains would hurry up and come in.

The four o'clock ain't here yet, and the six-ten's behind time.

MRS. SMITH. Yes, it seems funny, and I got such a funny feelin' today, too. I reckon somethin' must be goin' to happen. I laid awake most of the night for no reason whatsoever, and my eyes they itch, and my nose it itches, and my ears they feel wiggly, and I told Samanthy Jane this mornin' I just *know* somethin's goin' to happen.

JAKE. [*His jaw dropping.*] You don't suppose them robbers is coming to rob you the way they done the proprietoress in Center Junction yesterday, do you?

MRS. SMITH. Land 'a mercy, I hope not. And I got sixty-nine cents in the cash drawer, too. [*She pretends to look in the cash drawer in the desk.*] That is, I got sixty-nine cents, if Sam Hopkins over to the store will give me twenty-five cents for this Canadian quarter, and if he don't think this dime ain't wore too thin. Mercy me, what shall I do?

JAKE. [*In great distress.*] Couldn't you hide it?

MRS. SMITH. But where? They tear open the mattresses, and nothin' ain't safe from them nowhere.

JAKE. [*Diffidently.*] I notus ladies from the city hide their money on themselves—in their stockin's, I guess it 'tis.

MRS. SMITH. [*Sharply.*] How do you know?

JAKE. [*Innocently.*] I seed them—many times.

MRS. SMITH. You did, did you, hey? And then you told Si Brown you was rushed to death with the work here. Well, just ask me for the five cents a day raise, and I'll see you earn it first. [*Snorts.*] Lookin' at city ladies. But what'll I do with my money? Them robbers was a lady, too, wasn't she? Dressed real swell, too, wasn't she?

JAKE. Yep, them robbers was a lady and a man—one of them gent guys what pushes a chair under a lady when she sets down, and takes off his lid every time he looks at her. And they come to Center Junction on this same four o'clock express what ain't here yet.

MRS. SMITH. [*With a heavy sigh.*] Well, I just know

somethin's goin' to happen. My ears ain't never tweaked less somethin' does.

JAKE. And I heerd they offered a re-ward for the capture of them robbers, too.

MRS. SMITH. You don't say! How much?

JAKE. [*In awe-struck tone.*] Five dollars!

MRS. SMITH. Five dollars! Land a' mercy, ain't some folks got money! Say, wouldn't it be excitin' if me and you could ketch 'em—

JAKE. [*Weighing the matter.*] It would if we could, but they might get your sixty-nine cents.

MRS. SMITH. Dearie me, if only I had some place what was real safe,—I'd go out and hunt for them robbers. [*She pretends to be looking for a safe place behind the counter, when a thought suddenly occurs to her. Briskly.*] Jake, you face frontwards and dust the rim of that table.

JAKE. [*Dusting the edge of the table.*] I don't need to face frontwards for that.

MRS. SMITH. [*Stamping her foot.*] Jake, I said face frontwards and see that spot on the wall.

JAKE. [*Shamblingly facing forward, and looking with vacant gaze at the pretended wall.*] Well, of all queer notions—

[*Mrs. Smith turns her back to the audience, and watching to see that Jake does not see her, quickly pretends to stick the money in her stocking. She straightens up at the same moment Jake turns around.*]

JAKE. I don't see no spot there 'cept the one what's been there for twenty-five years, and that ain't new.

MRS. SMITH. [*Pleased with her strategy.*] I was just wantin' you to be observin', Jake. If you're goin' to be a detectuv, you might as well learn how.

JAKE. [*Getting excited.*] Wouldn't it be just whoopin' if you and me could ketch them thieves, Mis' Smith?

MRS. SMITH. [*Correcting him.*] Me and you, Jake.

JAKE. But you ain't got that money hid yet, Mis' Smith.

MRS. SMITH. I has.

JAKE. You has! I didn't see you put it nowhere.

MRS. SMITH. [*Triumphantly.*] No, I guess you didn't.

JAKE. [*Persisting.*] But *where* did you put it?

MRS. SMITH. That ain't none of your business, Jake.

JAKE. Well, if only that train would come—

[CARSON *off the stage, of course, calls loudly*, Toot-toot! Toot-Toot!]

JAKE. Oh, there she be! That's the four o'clock—I can tell her by her whistle.

MRS. SMITH. Land a'sakes, I'm gettin' excited. Supposin' the robbers should be on this!

[CARSON *calls in a weaker tone*, Toot-a-toot-toot! Toot-a-toot-toot!]

JAKE. [*Hopping about excitedly.*] There's the six o'clock's whistle. She's down by the spur. Two trains to onct!

MRS. SMITH. Mercy me, somethin's goin' to happen.

[CARSON *says*, Klang-klang, k-l-a-n-g-K-l-a-n-g.]

JAKE. There's the four o'clock stopping.

MRS. SMITH. [*Clutching JAKE by the arm.*] Now remember, look out for a swell lady and a gent.

[*The door bursts open, and CARSON as JOHN BALTMORE, and MISS ZANE as MARY, his bride, come in. JOHN is dressed in a neat traveling suit, and MARY wears a "bridey" coat and hat. JOHN escorts MARY to the table at the right, and seats her very politely. JAKE and MRS. SMITH exchange meaning glances.*

JOHN. [*To MARY.*] This isn't exactly a honey-moon eating place, dear, but anyway it seems clean. [*He seats himself and pretends to take up the bill of fare and read it. To JAKE, who has stealthily tip-toed near.*] Bring up some fried spring chicken, and please be quick about it. Our train leaves in fifteen minutes. [*To MARY.*] You like fried spring chicken, love, don't you?

JAKE. [*Stolidly.*] The fried spring chicken ain't ketched yet.

JOHN. But then, why is it on the bill-of-fare?

MRS. SMITH. [*Coming from behind the desk. In crisp tones.*] Because all first-class eatin' joints has fried spring chicken on the bill-o'-fare.

JOHN. Ah, I see; and this is a first-class eating joint—
[MARY giggles.]

MRS. SMITH. Well?

JOHN. Well, some of this pork tenderloin, then.

MRS. SMITH. We ain't got that, neither, and no one ain't never asked for it before, besides.

MARY. Dearest, ask them what they have.

JAKE. [*Before JOHN can open his mouth. In sing-song tone.*] Pork and beans—hash—spuds—apple pie—coffee—and doughnuts.

JOHN. [*Pretending to throw down the card.*] Well, then, that's what we will have, and bring it in immediately, please.

JAKE. Yes—sure—

MRS. SMITH. [*Elbowing JAKE out of the way, who gapes at her in astonishment.*] It will take ten minutes to serve it.

JOHN. But our train leaves in fifteen minutes.

MRS. SMITH. [*Stiffly.*] We don't hurry for nobody.

MARY. [*To JOHN.*] Well, if we have to wait, let's go out on the platform. It's so stuffy in here.

JOHN. Yes, let's. [*They go out.*]

JAKE. [*In sibilant whisper.*] It's them all right! Did you see the way he fixed her chair, and how perlite he was?

MRS. SMITH. Yes, it's them, all right. But, you fool, why did you say they could get their beans right away? Now, you see, I got them out of the place, and you can run for Constable Perkins—

JAKE. He ain't home. He's gone fishin'—

MRS. SMITH. Just like him—ain't around when the biggest opportunity this village has ever seen is walking on the platform.

MISS HOLSUM. [*Out in hall.*] Klang-klang—klang.

JAKE. There's the six o'clock coming.

MRS. SMITH. Well, we don't care nothin' about that—we as good as got the robbers now.

JAKE. No, we ain't got them. They're at large—outside. [*A fearful thought strikes him*] Oh, Mis' Smith, suppose they sneak off on this train.

MRS. SMITH. Oh, maybe they got serspicious of me. Oh, run, Jake, quick and see.

JAKE. [*Runs and pokes his head out of the door. Excitedly.*] No, they be there yet—they be holding hands.

MRS. SMITH. Concoctering some scheme, I bet.

JAKE. Oh, and here comes one lady—no two ladies, cause there's one back of her, from the six o'clock. They're heading this way.

MRS. SMITH. [*Fearfully.*] Was there more than one lady in the hold-up? Maybe, they be what's that word—accomplishments?

JAKE. Sh—

MRS. SMITH. Well, we got to shoo them out, too, because we can't have them messing up the place, when we're ketching robbers.

JAKE. [*Withdrawing his head from the door.*] Sh—here's the first one.

[*MISS HOLSUM comes in. She is very pretty and dressed in a becoming suit and hat. She is MISS KEEP, a beginning newspaper woman. MRS. SMITH regards her suspiciously, while JAKE is rapidly succumbing to admiration for her.*]

MISS KEEP. [*Seating herself at the left table. To JAKE.*] A cup of coffee, please, and a doughnut.

[*JAKE is about to go out when MRS. SMITH intercepts him.*]

MRS. SMITH. We ain't servin' nothin', Miss, today.

MISS KEEP. [*Disappointed.*] Oh. [*In charming manner, to MRS. SMITH.*] Did a young man and a pretty girl come in on the train just ahead of this? I looked for them, and couldn't see them.

[JAKE is about to answer "Yes," but MRS. SMITH shakes her head at him warningly.]

MRS. SMITH. [Her arms akimbo.] What for do you want them?

MISS KEEP. Why, er—

[The door bursts open and MISS LINDER comes in, aggressively. Her tailored suit is on rather severe lines. She is MISS CAIRNS, a detective.]

MISS CAIRNS. [In crisp, business-like tones.] Did a well-dressed man and young lady come in on this first train?

MISS KEEP. [Brightly.] Why, I've just been inquiring for them, too.

MISS CAIRNS. What are you after them for?

MISS KEEP. Why, I represent the *Daily News*.

MISS CAIRNS. Oh, you are one of those newspaper detectives. Well, I came on this job first.

MISS KEEP. [Rising.] But I beg your pardon, I was in here first. Wasn't I? [She appeals to JAKE.]

[JAKE nods his head vigorously, but MRS. SMITH stops him by taking hold of his hair.]

MISS CAIRNS. That doesn't make any difference. You newspaper people are always butting into our work.

MISS KEEP. What do you do?

MISS CAIRNS. I'm from the Soft-Foot Detective Agency. [Decisively.] I don't want to be mean about this, but I have to make good on this case, so I wish you would keep out of it.

MISS KEEP. But I have to make good on this case, too. [Almost in tears.] The editor told me if I didn't find out about this, I'd lose my job.

JAKE. There, now, Miss, don't cry. I'll help you get them.

MRS. SMITH. Jake.

MISS KEEP. They're friends of mine, too.

JAKE. [Aghast.] Friends of yours?

MRS. SMITH. [With an expressive glance at JAKE as

much as to say, "Didn't I know it?"] Yes, friends of yours.

MISS CAIRNS. [*With contempt.*] And you admit it! [*She turns her back on her. To MRS. SMITH.*] You haven't answered my question yet. Have those people been in here?

MRS. SMITH. You'll have to find that out yourself, Madam.

MISS CAIRNS. Very well, then, I'll go out and look around again. [*She turns for the door.*]

MRS. SMITH. [*Thinking quickly, while JAKE gasps at her.*] Say, come to think of it, they was in here just a minute ago, and they went out. I'll see if I can see 'em. [*She runs ahead to the door, and blocks MISS CAIRNS' passage, while she bobs her head in both directions. Excitedly.*] Oh, there they be—up at the south end—they be just goin' off the platform—You'll have to run to ketch them—

MISS CAIRNS. [*Shrilly.*] Let me by! [*She wedges past MRS. SMITH through the door.*]

MISS KEEP. Oh, let me go, too. [*She also runs through the door. JAKE runs for the door, too, but is shoved back by MRS. SMITH, who closes the door.*]

MRS. SMITH. No, you don't go, Jake. You help me!

JAKE. But the five dollars' reward! You going to let that bossy woman get it!

MRS. SMITH. [*In good humor with herself.*] And you want to help the pretty one get it? Nò, Jake, I'm goin' to get it!

JAKE. [*In disgust.*] How you going to get it, when you let that woman get the start?

MRS. SMITH. [*Tolerantly.*] Jake, you must think I'm some fool. [*Triumphantly.*] I sent them detectuvs to the south end of the platform, and the robbers is down to the north end!

JAKE. [*Admiringly.*] Well, I take it all back, Mis' Smith!

MRS. SMITH. [*Shrewdly.*] Still, I better be lookin'

where they be. [*She opens the door and peeps out. In excited whisper.*] The robbers be headen' this way—and I can't see the detectuvs—

JAKE. [*Hoarsely.*] What shall we do?

MRS. SMITH. We got to ketch 'em quick. [*She thinks rapidly.*] I know! They'll come in and set down at the table. They'll pretend to anyways before they try to rob us. Then you get behind the gent, and I'll get behind the lady, and then we'll grab 'em both at the same time.

JAKE. The man's bigger'n me—

MRS. SMITH. [*Derisively.*] 'Fraid cat!

JAKE. I ain't—but he's likely got a gun—

MRS. SMITH. [*Snorts.*] Well, what's a bullet shot alongside of five dollars!

JAKE. [*Grumbling.*] Yes, but I don't get five dollars for getting shot. I only get half of five dollars.

MRS. SMITH. And you can be glad you get it—if you do. Ain't I the one what's usin' the brains? I think I ought to have more'n half.

JAKE. Yes, but I'm the one what's getting shot!

MRS. SMITH. Shut up, you ain't shot yet. [*A noise is heard outside the door.*] Sh— now, remember, you take the man, gun or no gun!

[*The door opens and JOHN and MARY come in, laughing and evidently very happy. MRS. SMITH and JAKE keep stealthily after them.*]

JAKE. [*In whisper to MRS. SMITH.*] They don't look like robbers!

MRS. SMITH. [*Knowingly.*] That's to throw us off the track!

[*JOHN and MARY seat themselves at the table, still very much engrossed with each other. MRS. SMITH tip-toes behind MARY, and JAKE timorously stands back a safe distance from JOHN.*]

JOHN. [*Taking his eyes off MARY and seeing MRS. SMITH.*] Are our things ready?

MRS. SMITH. [*Ominously.*] They'll be in a second.

MARY. [*Mildly.*] Why the ten minutes must be up, and you promised to have it ready for us—

MRS. SMITH. [*Significantly.*] Oh, you'll have lots of time.

JOHN. [*Looking at his watch, with a little irritation.*] Nonsense, we have only five minutes. Serve us, immediately, please!

[*The door bursts open and MISS CAIRNS comes in at a run, panting for breath.*]

MISS CAIRNS. Oh, there they are!

MRS. SMITH. [*To JAKE. Squeals.*] Now's the time! Catch him, Jake! [*She pins MARY's arms down to her side, and JAKE, not daring not to obey her, folds his arms in a vise-like grip around JOHN. For a second, both MARY and JOHN are too astonished to protest.*]

MISS CAIRNS. That's right! Hold them for me! [*She runs back and forth.*]

JOHN. [*Struggling with JAKE.*] What does this mean? Here, let me go! [*To MRS. SMITH.*] Let go my wife, there!

MARY. Oh, John, help me!

MRS. SMITH. [*Who is not having much difficulty with MARY's struggles. Indignantly, to MISS CAIRNS.*] Hold 'em for you! You got your nerve. We're holdin' 'em for ourselves!

MISS CAIRNS. What do you want them for?

JOHN. [*Struggling more vigorously with JAKE.*] That's what I'd like to know!

MRS. SMITH. [*Belligerently.*] For the reward, the same as you! For the five dollars!

JOHN. [*Angry, yet desiring to laugh.*] Heavens, is that all!

MARY. [*Indignantly—the others pay no attention to her.*] Is that all father thinks we're worth!

MISS CAIRNS. [*Almost screams.*] Five dollars! The reward is *Five Hundred Dollars*!

MRS. SMITH AND JAKE. [*Gasp simultaneously.*] FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS! [*In their astonish-*

ment, they both let go of their captives, and MARY flies to JOHN, who closes her tightly in his arms.]

MISS CAIRNS. [*Screams.*] Oh, don't let them go!

MARY. [*Smiling to John.*] I knew father wouldn't offer only five dollars.

MISS CAIRNS. [*Snorts.*] FATHER wouldn't! That's a new one to put over—

JOHN. [*Taking the matter as a joke, but still a little puzzled at MISS CAIRN'S last speech.*] Really, my good people, you have spent a lot of energy for nothing. I suppose my father-in-law, in his excitement, offered a reward to stop us, but you see that won't hold good any longer. We were married just an hour ago. Congratulations, and not warrants, are due.

[MRS. SMITH and JAKE, in utter bewilderment, just gape at each other.]

MISS CAIRNS. [*Coldly, with curling lips.*] Well, that's a new story to put over. [*She turns back the lapel of her coat.*] Do you see that star? Well, I know who you are. You are "Sleight-of-hand" Bankes, and your "wife" there is "Light-fingered Nell," and you are wanted for the Smallville Bank forgery.

JOHN AND MARY. Forgery!

MRS. SMITH. [*To MISS CAIRNS.*] Ain't they the robbers what robbed Center Junction?

MISS CAIRN. [*With contempt.*] Do you think I bother with robbers? No, these are forgers.

JAKE. [*Shambling off and nursing his arms that JOHN had wrenched in the struggle.*] It's robbers we're after—not forgers.

JOHN. [*Angrily to MISS CAIRNS.*] Forgers, you call us. Just let me get to a telegraph operator! [*He holds MARY in one arm and starts for the door.*]

MISS CAIRNS. [*Screams to MRS. SMITH and JAKE.*] Hold them! Hold them! [*She grabs hold of JOHN, who tries to ward her off.*]

JAKE. [*Obstinately.*] I ain't got nothing to do with forgers.

MRS. SMITH. [*Shrilly.*] How much of the reward will you give us?

MISS CAIRNS. [*Still struggling with JOHN.*] Half—no, I mean, I will give you five dollars apiece—

MRS. SMITH. [*Joyfully.*] Five dollars apiece! Come on, Jake! Come on! [*She also gets hold of JOHN.*] Jake, come on!

JAKE. Well, for five dollars, I will. [*He, too, takes hold of JOHN and MARY, who are having a hard time with their assailants. The door bursts open and MISS KEEP comes running in. She carries a telegram in her hand.*]

MISS KEEP. Why, John! Why, Mary! What does this mean?

MARY. [*Disentangling herself from the fracas and running to MISS KEEP.*] Oh, Lucy, tell them we're not robbers and forgers.

MISS KEEP. [*As others stop in perplexity.*] Forgers! Why, they're not forgers! They're elopers!

MISS CAIRNS. [*Grimly.*] It will take more than your word for me to believe that, young lady. You said you knew them, and I wouldn't be surprised if you were hired just for this!

MISS KEEP. You're Miss Cairns, aren't you?

MISS CAIRNS. That's my name.

MISS KEEP. [*Handing her the telegram.*] Then maybe this telegram, which the operator just handed me, may explain matters.

MISS CAIRNS. [*Rapidly reading the telegram.*] "Sleight-of-hand" Bankes and "Light-fingered" Nell captured. Come home. [*In hollow tone.*] Well, evidently you are just elopers, then. I—I beg your pardon.

MARY. [*In heartfelt tone.*] Oh, Lucy, you came just in the nick of time.

[MISS GRAY, from the side-lines, calls, "Toot-Toot."]

MISS KEEP. That's our train going. We'll have to run. [JOHN and MARY and MISS KEEP, followed by MISS CAIRNS, all run for the door.]

[*Joyfully.*] And I can get the story for the paper—

JOHN. You bet you can!

[*They all disappear.*]

MRS. SMITH. [*Indignantly to JAKE.*] What'd she have to raise our hopes for, offerin' us five dollars apiece?

[*MISS GRAY gives the signal and the soldiers quickly drop the curtains.*]

[*NOTE.—Another specialty number may be introduced now, if it is desired to make the program longer.*]

At the close of the program, the actors come out and the soldiers mix with them, laughing and congratulating them. MISS BURKE passes the satchel of smokes and candies.

O'TOOLE. [*Calls to BAKER.*] Say, Baker, find out what day and month and year it is, so we can mark this down right!

MILLER. [*To MISS GRAY.*] You will never know how much this laugh has meant to us!

CARSON. [*Looking at his watch.*] I'm sorry, but that train of wounded may be here soon, and we must go.

MISS GRAY. Just a second, Lieutenant. Let us sing the national anthem first.

ALL SING "The Star-Spangled Banner."

CURTAIN.

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